



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703

Michael Neuroth Policy Advocate for International Issues

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Third Way - Seeking a Just Peace in Syria

The world has focused its attention on the nation of Syria and on the anticipated response by the U.S. to the use of chemical weapons, weapons allegedly used by the Assad regime. President Obama has called for military strikes in response to these attacks, and administration officials have been on a media blitz to convince the American people that our choice is between a military strike or "doing nothing" in the face of such horrors.

The faith community has rejected these two options and has been outspoken both in its abhorrence of chemical weapons and in its hope to find alternatives to military strikes. Limiting our options to impunity (doing nothing) or military strikes is an obviously false choice put before the American people. The call for other options has been loud and clear...and growing.

Over the past week, the United Church of Christ alone has generated over 3,000 letters to the President and members of Congress calling for alternatives to military strikes and the need for increased political and humanitarian responses. The UCC Collegium of Officers have signed ecumenical letters calling for strengthened diplomatic efforts, de-escalation of the violence, and a political solution. UCC churches have dedicated signs to messages of peace, clergy have lifted

up sermons on non-violence, and members have joined or led prayer vigils and demonstrations across the country.

In the UCC, this call for "another way" is consistent with our historic witness of Just Peace. Our Just Peace vision, <http://www.ucc.org/justice/just-peace/>, represents a third-way between Just War and Pacifism, calling for justice as a means of seeking peace and avoiding war. Over the years, theologians and scholars developed this theory and recommended practices. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite, a UCC member, has been at the center of these efforts. Susan's article in the Washington Post, *10 Things We Can Do Right Now About Syria Instead of Bombing*, offers what a Just Peace response to the conflict looks like. These include diplomatic and humanitarian recommendations as well as pre-emptive and creative peacemaking efforts in line with the Just Peace practice #2 "Take Independent Initiatives to Reduce Threat."

As I write this, Russia has offered a surprising example of this pre-emptive peaceful initiative by suggesting Syria's chemical weapons come under UN control. This suggestion is an example of creative alternatives needed to resolve this crisis. More proposals are needed. We require political courage and creativity in order to explore and implement real alternatives. I believe this will only come if people of faith and conscience across the U.S. express their own moral courage and creativity by calling for and imagining alternatives to military strikes.

I pray that in the coming days more alternatives will surface, and the drumbeat toward war will be drowned by the feet of people marching in the street for peace. May it be so.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

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